THE

INFLUENCE OF EXAMPLE:

A

SERMON.

[Price Eighteen Pence.]

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INFLUENCE OF EXAMPLE:

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT

DUKE STREET CHAPEL.

BY THE REVEREND

R. SHEPHERD, D. D.

ARCHDEACON OF BEDFORD.

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IF THERE EVER WERE A PERIOD THAT CALLED LOUDER THAN COMMON ON THOSE WHO OCCUPY THE SUPERIOUR WALKS IN LIFE, TO DIVEST THEMSELVES OF THE HABITS OF DISSIPATION, AND BY THE INFLUENCE OF EXAMPLE EXCITE THEIR INFERIOURS TO THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUE, AND RESPECT FOR RELIGION; TO THAT PURPOSE, THE PRESENT PERIOD DOTH MOST ALARMINGLY ADDRESS THEM. WITH SUCH CONSIDERATION CONCURRING, A PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCE HATH INDUCED THE OBTRUSION OF THE SUBSEQUENT PAGES ON THE PUBLIC; WHICH ARE ADDRESSED TO THOSE, AT WHOSE INSTANCE THEY APPEAR, BY

THEIR OBLIGED,

AND MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

S. S. Banks 1793.

A

SERMON.

EXODUS, XXIII. 2.

THOU SHALT NOT FOLLOW A MULTITUDE TO DO EVIL.

THE features of the human countenance are ſcarcely more different and diſtinguiſhing, than the colours of the mind. And theſe, thus naturally varying, variouſly biaſs our judgment, and produce in us correſpondently different habits of acting. Yet, amidſt this variety of opinions, the difference of humours and inclinations, there is obſervable a more general uniformity of thinking and acting, than might be expected. An error propagated, and a ſcheme of action founded on it, we often ſee as readily embraced, and as univerſally followed, as truth, and truth's acknowledged and moſt approved reſults. Whence it is, that opinions and practices are ſo apt to be taken upon truſt, and ſo few are found to think freely

freely for themſelves, may be an object of no uſeleſs enquiry. Is it, that we are too idle to employ our minds in the operoſe buſineſs of ſerious thinking? Or is it, that we are too diffident of ourſelves, and too complaiſant to the opinions of others? Or, without refining too much, may it not all be reſolved into the force of example?

But here then ariſes another queſtion? who are they that form the example? What is it, that gives it force, that has influence enough to caſt the model, which others bring their minds to copy, and mould their actions to an imitation of it? Is he the man of wiſdom: is it virtue, that attracts our notice? No: for then we ſhould have no reaſon to complain; then we ſhould ſee the world much better than it is. Is it power and conſequence? No: for then we ſhould indeed experience the happy fruits of it; the moſt elevated characters in this kingdom beaming the moſt brilliant examples of moral and religious virtue. Is it an ideal kind of ſtandard, that the pretender to reaſon ſets up, and calls it moral rectitude, or fitneſs of things? No: for then we ſhould have ſome kind of plea, ſome pretence, ſomething at leaſt ſavouring of an excuſe, for following, like the brutal herd their leader, modes of thinking, though vague and vain, leſs void of ſenſe, and ſchemes of acting from thence derived, though deſultory and unfixed, leſs charactered with abſurdity, than thoſe which now prevail. From whence then the faſhionable modes of thinking and acting, that influence the morals of this age, originate, ſhall be the ſubject of our preſent inveſtigation. And when traced to their proper ſource, ſhould fair diſcuſſion prove them to be the monſtrous production of SUPERSTITION and INFIDELITY; numbers, perhaps, little aware of what they follow, when they ſee cauſes explained, will diſclaim the motives on which they have acted, and be induced to abandon the influence of them.

Superſtition

Superſtition, trembling where there is nothing to fear, and hoarding up an imaginary ſtock of virtue in acts that coſt nothing, and in reality are nothing worth, renders herſelf ridiculous, and her meaſures contemptible. Of this infidelity fails not to take advantage, with a ſneer of faſtidious pity points to the ſelf-tormentor; affects the ſuperior reach of thought, and endeavours to perſuade the world, that becauſe ſuperſtition is ridiculous, infidelity is wiſe. Endeavours, did I ſay: ſhe does perſuade the world, it is ſo: at leaſt ſhe perſuades *the children of this world*, thoſe who live in ſtile, and have no judgment of their own, to think ſo. And thoſe are many: thoſe are they to whom the humbler multitude look up, and follow them. And why they follow thoſe, rather than the few men of ſenſe and virtue, whoſe poſitions are very different, who think for themſelves, and bow only to truth, I will endeavour to explain.

In the firſt place, in ſupport of its pretenſions, infidelity has all the indulgences of the world to offer. It has routed ſuperſtition, and, by a well pointed ſneer uniting religion with her, triumphs equally over both. She points to bowers of pleaſure, and bids her votaries follow thither. She laughs at narrow prejudices, and ſays, *all theſe things will I give thee.* From that gay figure then turn your eyes to ſuperſtition; ſee her mourning over imaginary evils, behold her brooding upon fancied good, obſerve her admitting tenets that reaſon diſclaims, and purſuing a conduct which nature abhors: obſerve religion cunningly coupled with her; an union, which ſome underſtandings cannot, and ſome will not ſeparate, and diſtinguiſh between them: and then, is not the facility plain, by which inclination is captivated, reaſon is dazzled, falſe prejudices taken up, and people are led *to follow a multitude to do evil?* It was this palatable principle of free indulgence, that for a time ſupported the

Pagan theology againſt the ſplendid light of Chriſtianity; which not without many a painful ſtruggle, forced at laſt the reluctant gods from their altars: gods, that authorized by their own examples, every indulgence in the moſt degrading acts of ſenſuality. It was this principle, that extended the religion of Mahomet, the impure religion of a notoriouſly bad man, over a third part of the globe. And as thoſe, who promiſe pleaſure to others, to procure credit to their engagements, muſt appear to enjoy it themſelves; thoſe of the deſcription, we are now conſidering, affect an air of gaiety, which does not belong to them, as if reſulting from an approbation of their own judgment, their own ſuperiour judgment, in the election of their practice and purſuits. With aſſumed conſequence they launch out into the world, unſhackled by reſtraints, that tie the vulgar down; exemplars of politeneſs, men of pleaſure, men of wit, men of the world. Externals ſpeak loudly in their favour. Their eaſy manners, accommodated to win attention, their reach of underſtanding, exemplified in deſpiſing common opinions, and living above common rules, their liberal contempt of every thing that is held ſacred and connected with religion, are ſo many incentives to imitation, and win over votaries to practical infidelity. Charmed with ſo pleaſurable a perſuaſion, light minds are not over nice in examining the truth of it; but take that upon truſt, and think it ſufficient excuſe for themſelves, if they be as good as their neighbours.

Now to diſabuſe mankind in theſe particulars of inveiglement, it may be ſufficient to ſuggeſt, as a caution againſt too eaſy an admiſſion of the ſuperiour underſtanding of thoſe pretenders to it; that nothing is more common, than to miſtake an affectation of thinking ſingularly, for an ability of thinking deeply. This is a ſhort road to a ſhort-lived reputation; which vanity often takes, and by which

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ſuperficial minds are eaſily impoſed on. And as to the air of gaiety they aſſume, it may be obſerved, that no judgment is ſo fallible, as that which is formed from appearances; that the heart often beats heavily, while the countenance is blazoned over with oſtentatious ſmiles; that nothing leſs than real virtue can ſupport ſerenity of mind and real cheerfulneſs. God Almighty hath conſtituted ſo cloſe an union between piety and cheerfulneſs, happineſs and virtue, as all the art and device of man can never ſeparate. If we be really good; in any and every ſituation, we may be cheerful: if otherwiſe, in no ſituation whatever can we feel ourſelves at eaſe.

And as the appearance of gaiety, in characters who thus affect it, may deceive others; ſo in their notions of religion do they often deceive themſelves. When they regard it as gloomy and melancholy, an unſatisfactory and unſociable thing; they notoriouſly miſtake, or wilfully miſrepreſent it. For from whence it may be aſked, do they derive ſuch an opinion of it? Not from the ſcriptures; for ſhe is there repreſented as leading Joy and Satisfaction in her train: *her ways* are there deſcribed, as *ways of pleaſantneſs*; and *her paths*, as the path-way of *peace*. Not from obſervation, or from reaſon; for ſhe appears, and has a rational right to be cheerful, having the promiſe of this world, and that which is to come. And the conduct of thoſe, who on this falſe preſumption offend, could they be brought to think as deeply as they would be eſteemed to do, would they even think ſeriouſly and ſoberly on it, they would find involved a degree of folly, which in matters of worldly concern, would ruin their reputation of acuteneſs. It is, to reduce it to a kind of illuſtration with which every man of the world is well acquainted, a ſpecies of play, they would in any other inſtance be aſhamed of. For ſhould the things,

at which they laugh, be as ridiculous as they repreſent them; they gain nothing: ſhould they not be ſo; they loſe every thing.

I will mention one cauſe more of no ſmall influence in perverting the mind, and gaining proſelytes to the cauſe of irreligion; which is the oſtentation of magnanimity. True courage or fortitude, if it rank not firſt in the fair train of moral virtues, is perhaps of all others the moſt luminous and attractive. Its influence is extenſive; it engages the moſt indifferent. We cannot ſee a man, however unconnected with him, grappling with adverſity, ſtruggling with ſuperiority of power, not calling to his aſſiſtance the arts of fraud, not ſacrificing at the ſhrine of vice, but holding faſt his integrity, and defying danger in the purſuit of what is right, (and this is true magnanimity) without admiring him, without wiſhing him ſucceſs. And as virtue, like ſterling coin, is liable to be counterfeited, ſo particularly is the virtue of which we are ſpeaking. To laugh at things which wiſe and good men hold ſerious, to over-leap the bounds that virtue preſcribes, and ſtart and ſtop at nothing that promiſes ſelf-indulgence, to confound the diſtinctions, which ſome hold ſacred, between virtue and vice, right and wrong, to cut aſunder the line, which confines paſſion within the limits of duty, to intrench upon forms, wiſely calculated to preſerve the ſubſtance of religion, at the firſt bluſh diſcovers a ſpecies of courage. The appearance of fortitude captivates, and what we admire, we are prone to imitate. We queſtion not the ground of ſuch pretenſions, or accompanied with all thoſe characters of fortitude, we ſhould detect under the falſe colouring conſummate cowardice; we ſhould find, to carry on the alluſion, a baſe paltry metal caſed or tinſelled over, to gain currency and deceive. To ſacrifice the happineſs of others to our own gratifications or convenience, is cruelty; and cowards only, and they always,

ways, are cruel. To endeavour to confound the diſtinctions of right and wrong, is to form a bad apology for depraved actions; actions which we dare not hold to public view, till by raiſing a cloud of error, we had perverted the public ſight. This is alſo cowardice. To ſport with ſacred things, and ſtrive to laugh religion out of door, as a mortifying, timid, daſtardly thing, may be hardineſs: but it is fool-hardineſs; it is hardineſs againſt God, in complaiſance to man: it originates in a ſilly ſervile fear of the one, and in a brutal ignorance or ſtupid defiance of the other.

Having thus pointed out ſome of theſe general cauſes, that contribute to ſeduce the world from the paths of virtue and truth; I will proceed to conſider ſome particular inſtances in which they at this day obſervedly operate.

And firſt, in regard to the public worſhip of Almighty God, we ſee their effects too glaringly in the common deſertion of our churches. A form of religion even thoſe, of the deſcription we have juſt noticed, hold proper enough to be kept up; and they conceive it right, that the lower orders of the people ſhould be taught to conform to it, and frequent our churches. But men of buſineſs have other concerns, men of pleaſure have other purſuits, and philoſophical men have more refined ſpeculations to engage their attention. Yet would men of buſineſs fairly eſtimate the concerns of this world, and of the next, would they ſet in competition their obligations and duties to their Creator, and their ſchemes of accumulating wealth; ſhould thoſe duties and the purſuance of thoſe ſchemes at any time interfere, they would not heſitate a moment where to allow the preference. If the man of pleaſure would give an edge to pleaſure, and inſure it to himſelf, let him make in the firſt place,

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the Author of all Good his friend; that Being, who with a laviſh hand, ſcattered thoſe pleaſures on the face of the earth, and called him from a ſtate of nothingneſs to enjoy them. And can he ſecure the favour of that Almighty Being more rationally, than by taking every opportunity of paying his reverence to Him, of making a public profeſſion of his zeal for Him, by warm effuſions of gratitude, expreſſed in thoſe places more immediately ſet apart for his worſhip? And as to the refined ſpeculations to which men of philoſophical minds may pretend; can they find a more elevated ſubject, on which to employ their thoughts, than their Creator? And can they more profitably employ them on Him, than in joining with their fellow creatures in direct acts of adoration, praiſe, and thankſgiving? Will their moſt elevated ſpeculations more acceptably expreſs their duty to Him, or be more likely to pleaſe Him? And ſo infinitely is He removed from our limited conceptions; what our endeavours ſhould chiefly aim at reſpecting Him, is to expreſs our duty to, and to pleaſe, Him.

But they can do all this at home. No: they can privately worſhip Him at home; and ſo they ought to do. Such are acts which ought to be performed; but the other is not to be left undone. Let thoſe men of ſpeculation, who are uſed to exerciſe their minds in abſtract reaſoning, for a moment conſider the univerſality of cuſtom, which hath in every country, and in every age, erected temples to the Deity. And then let them queſtion themſelves, whether ſuch univerſality of cuſtom, muſt not have as univerſal a cauſe; whether God Almighty hath not directed all mankind, as well as Solomon, *to build him a houſe*, by a ſecret impulſe ſtamped upon the human mind. For antient hiſtory informs us of no nation, that had not their temples and their God. And it is very remarkable, that even among thoſe wretched

Barbarians,

Barbarians, whom the diſcoveries of modern travellers have made known to us, thoſe, who were themſelves almoſt without houſes, when their reſpective ſtates have been accurately inveſtigated, and their manners known, have never been found without temples, bowers, or caves, conſecrated to the more immediate preſence of their God. And one thing I will venture to aſſert, that the man of pleaſure, the man of buſineſs, and he of philoſophic mind, when the day of ſickneſs overtakes him, and the hour of death approaches, when he ſees things as they are, and not as the falſe medium of worldly prejudice may repreſent them, will confeſs thoſe hours to have been the beſt ſpent periods of his life, that had been ſpent in a public attendance on his Creator, and adorative acts of praiſe.

The inſtance I have next to produce, of the ill effects of prevailing faſhion, is in the general diſuſe of a long eſtabliſhed and pious cuſtom, a cuſtom on which we may defy the world to fix the ſtigma of abſurdity; the act of thankſgiving formerly obſerved at a principal meal, termed a Grace. This diſuſe originated among the lower orders of people; but, contrary to the general force of example, has ſince aſcended, and been adopted by the higheſt; by ſuch as ought to have been better informed. The puritaniſm of the laſt century, by lengthening out this ſhort form beyond all reaſon, might have rendered it apparently ridiculous, and perhaps in ſome inſtances inconvenient; and the libertiniſm of this age, from the tables of the truly polite, hath refined it away. Yet it is a very old cuſtom: thus we find Samuel *bleſſing the feaſt or ſacrifice*; and *afterwards*, ſaith that portion of holy writ, *the people eat that were bidden.* That this likewiſe was our Saviour's cuſtom, appears from various paſſages. That it was his common practice, we may impliedly gather from the circumſtance at Emaus: where we are told, that having

having *broken bread and bleſſed it*, probably in ſome form of words commonly uſed by him, *his diſciples immediately knew him.* But the example neither of the prophet, nor of our Lord himſelf, I am aware, will have much weight with ſome: with others, however, it may have its influence, and triumph over the incroachments of faſhion. I contend not for a long ſuperfluous form of words: we know from the beſt authority, that *no man is heard for his much ſpeaking.* But ſurely, when the table is ſpread before us, loaded with luxurious viands, it cannot argue a littleneſs of underſtanding, it does not argue an ill-placed expreſſion of gratitude, to lift up the heart and eye to the Supreme Giver of all thoſe bleſſings, and thank him for them in a ſingle word of pious praiſe. And in what view conſidered, can we deſcry the unpoliteneſs of it? Do we affect abſolute independence? Do we own no being above us? On theſe principles of atheiſm, ſuch an obſervance may indeed be held unneceſſary, but on no principle of religion, can it be deemed an act of ſupererogation; on no principle of reaſon can it be proved ridiculous or unpolite.

I will detain you only with one inſtance more, in which example *leads a multitude to do evil*; and this, as well as the two former inſtances I produced, regards our duty to God. It is the great violation, which faſhion hath introduced among us, of the ſabbath-day. Though a phariſaical obſervance of it, ſuch a rigid obſervance, as is not only incompatible with indifferent, but even good actions, be foreign to the nature of its inſtitution; though we may not make it a day of idleneſs, we are certainly not to conſecrate it to purpoſes of pleaſure and thoughtleſs feſtivity. Though on the ſabbath-day we are to liſten to the voice of philanthropy, whenever it may call us to active duties; yet, let us not abuſe a permiſſion to

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do good, to an indulgence in doing harm. Let us not make the day of contemplative reſt, a day of bacchanals; let not revelry and diſſipation uſurp the place of good works, and ſeduce us from the fair ſtraight line of duty; nor let us ſuffer faſhion to inveigle us ſo far into her trammels, as by our practice to do away from the day every character of diſtinction. God hath ſaid, *hallow my ſabbaths.* And is it too much to ſacrifice one day in the week to the more immediate ſervice of Him, who has a right to exact it every day; but who graciouſly gives up to our plenary indulgence in innocent amuſements, and honeſt vocations of buſineſs, the other ſix? If however the buſy pleaſurable world will not be prevailed on to devote thoſe days wholly to religious meditations and exerciſes of piety; ſurely it will not be eſteemed too much, to dedicate them to ſome degree of privacy and retirement, and the tranquil ſatisfaction of domeſtic enjoyments. At leaſt, let us not employ it in the ordinary drudgery of our worldly concerns: much leſs celebrate the ſabbath of JEHOVAH in nocturnal orgies at diſſipation's various call; vainly delivered from one place of rendezvous, and one ſpecies of amuſement to another, forgetting ourſelves, our duty, and our God, and inviting by a bad example our inferiors to do the ſame. Let us not perſuade ourſelves, that we are worthily engaged, or innocently amuſed; when on a day, eſpecially devoted to the ſervice of the Almighty, we are proſecuting the common occupation of the week, or flying about to parties in chace of entertainment; crowding the roads with our carriages on pretended calls of buſineſs, or, to the obſtruction of ſober paſſengers, at the ſolicitation of pleaſure blocking up the ſtreets. Thoſe who are in the conſtant habit of buſineſs, as well as thoſe whoſe every day is open to amuſement, will find the intermiſſion of one day in ſeven, not only their duty, but conſidered in the view either of buſineſs or pleaſure, an

intereſting and advantageous relaxation. Such an intermiſſion gives vigour to the purſuit of buſineſs, and a new reliſh to innocent amuſement; ſo graciouſly hath our benevolent creator conſulted for us, as to make our duty, not only in this, but in every other inſtance of life, conducive both to our intereſt and our pleaſure.

Finally, as Chriſtians repreſent to yourſelves, for to ſuch only the nature of this diſcourſe applies, the danger to which thoſe commiſſions and omiſſions expoſe you; they regard God, and if by them you offend Him, you forfeit every future hope. If on the contrary they be indifferent, what is your gain? Not benefit; they may operate againſt intereſt, but can not poſſibly promote it: not pleaſure; for to thoſe, who ſix days in the week tread the giddy circle of amuſement, an uninterrupted ſucceſſion of it through the whole ſeven, tends only to ſatiety. For what then is all, this riſk encountered? For the poor ſatisfaction of an acquieſcence in faſhionable practices, a tame ſubmiſſion to cuſtom and example. If the caſe be fairly ſtated, let reaſon determine, whether it be not in the inſtances I have mentioned, more wiſe, and more adviſeable, to be a little ſingular; than to follow the multitude in practiees, which, to ſpeak moſt ſoftly of them, cannot be ſafe.

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